

Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agricultural Markets Program (RAMP)

RAMP GUIDELINES FOR PRODUCING BEST PRACTICES FACT SHEETS

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These guidelines are intended for job order bidders and contractors to use if they are generating or disseminating best practices. RAMP will provide a short term consultant to advise and help job order contractors identify subjects and to produce the fact sheets. RAMP will also provide a template they can use. The RAMP Communication Support Unit is also available to provide assistance to the contractors and help them identify firms to print the fact sheets. The introduction and sections 1 and 2 provide background information on what are fact sheets and why they are important. Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 are guidelines on how to produce fact sheets.

This communication task addresses the issue, “what information should be communicated to farmers?” During the past 20 years there has been almost no development of agricultural technology in the country. The new technology that has been generated inside Afghanistan or brought in from outside has not been packaged into a form which can be communicated through intermediary groups (input dealers, market buyers, and other influential groups) who will communicate the best practices to farmers. The goal of this task is to begin to develop a package of best practices fact sheets containing relevant and accurate information to be communicated to farmers.

Information is a commodity which can be packaged in different ways for various types of groups. Since illiteracy is high in the rural areas, much of the communication to farmers will be done through interpersonal (face-to-face) communications and possibly through radio. It is important to develop best practices fact sheets for the intermediary groups who will be communicating the information to farmers. This is called the “Wholesale-Retail Model of Technology Diffusion.” The best practices fact sheets are the wholesale information packages which the intermediary groups will verbally communicate at the retail level to farmers.

The term “fact sheet” is a generic term for brief printed materials – generally one or two pages in length – on specific subjects that will be used by the job order field teams and other groups for providing information to influential groups for communicating to farmers. Fact sheets are generally done in multiple languages—the primary languages of the intermediary groups and, if needed, English for the international community. Fact sheets are generally the starting point for identifying and developing messages for a project program support communication program. Once the fact sheets are prepared and approved, it is then easy to produce other communication materials and programs such as field days, farmer meetings, radio programs, posters, training materials, etc. The fact sheets assure that the basic messages are the same in these other communication programs/materials and that the facts are technically correct.

1. **Stakeholders and User Groups** – This section identifies the stakeholder groups who will be responsible for producing the best practices fact sheets and the influential groups who could use the fact sheets. The following are the stakeholders:

- **Job order technical teams** – any job order that contains elements related to generating best practices or communicating them to farmers and other stakeholder groups need to generate best practices fact sheets. This needs to be put into the job order contracts. The technical specialists on the job order teams will be responsible to ensuring the technical information is correct.
- **Technical communication teams** – the job order contractors will need to use technical writers and graphics specialists to work with their technical specialists to produce the fact sheets and pre-test them. A short term RAMP consultant will work with these teams providing a template to follow and give them advice and, if needed, training.

The following groups are potential users of the best practices fact sheets:

- **Job order contractor field teams** – the first use of the best practices fact sheets will be the job order contractor field program teams. They will be responsible for working with various intermediary groups who will use the information to communicate to farmers.
- **Other donor project teams** – it is important that the fact sheets are shared with other RAMP job order contractors and with projects of other donor agencies who are dealing with the same best practices. The goal of the fact sheets is to ensure that the correct information is communicated to farmers.
- **Influential groups at the community level** – the job order contractors and other users of the fact sheets need to identify all the key influential groups at the community level who can become channels of communication to farmers. These could include supply input dealers, market buyers, school teachers, local leaders, and other opinion leaders who can influence farmers to adopt the best practices.
- **Field workers** – these would be the agricultural extension workers and field personnel from other ministries such as irrigation, rural development, etc.
- **Mass media representatives** – the best practices fact sheets should also be provided to mass media representatives, along with training, who can integrate the information into the programs for farmers. The key mass media for communicating to Afghanistan farmers is currently radio. However, the print media can be important for communicating to influential groups such as input dealers, market buyers, political leaders, etc.

2. **Purpose of Fact Sheets** – Producing best practices fact sheets achieves two primary purposes:

- **Securing a consensus on the message** – for a specific best practice, a fact sheet puts all the relevant facts onto paper so it can be reviewed for technical content, policy and political appropriateness, its relevance for the intended audience – farmers – and the goals of the RAMP program. It is essential to get approvals before other materials (such as radio programs, posters, and field days) on this subject are produced. Fact sheets are the basic information source for producing other communication materials and programs. Getting a consensus of the exact messages a job order is to relay can be a difficult process. Producing fact sheets forces all parties to come to agreement what is the message.

- **Disseminating to intermediary groups** – the reason for producing fact sheets is to ensure that all participating groups are relaying the same messages. Fact sheets provide intermediary groups with information which they can integrate into their programs and communicate to farmers. Therefore, with fact sheets it is more likely these intermediary groups will be relaying to farmers the recommended best practices and the information will be accurate. Fact sheets should be the beginning step in putting together information that can be used for training programs and all the various communication programs in the job order.
- 3. Guidelines for Preparing Best Practices Fact Sheets** – The following are recommended steps job order contractors should use in producing best practices fact sheets:
- **Select the subjects** – one of the most important tasks is to identify the subjects which fact sheets will be prepared. The subjects must fit the priority messages for the job order. The subjects should be specific so that it can be put into a page or two with graphics or photographs included. A series of fact sheets can be prepared for a general subject. A “subject tree” needs to be prepared with multiple sub boxes under each main subject. Each box should represent a subject which a fact sheet is to be prepared. As you go down the subject tree the topics become more detailed on a specific subject. It is important that each fact sheet ***covers one specific subject which contains a single recommended best practice or theme.*** If a fact sheet contains too much information it needs to either be simplified or broken into two or more fact sheets. Fact sheets produced by RAMP job order contractors can be on technical subjects (such as insect control recommendations) or on extension processes (such as how to organize a field day).
 - **Establish the production team** – once the subjects are identified the job order contractor needs to assemble a team to produce the fact sheets. The team must include a technical specialist, technical writer (who has some understanding of the subject) and a graphics specialist. The team leader is normally a technical writer who is responsible for ensuring the intermediary groups using the fact sheets can understand the information and it contains all the information they need. The technical specialist is responsible for ensuring the information is technically correct. The graphics specialist is responsible for pictures, drawings and charts to help better explain the messages and ensure the layout is pleasing and professional.
 - **Prepare draft fact sheets** – the production team should determine the titles for individual fact sheets, write the copy, select the visuals and prepare one or more layouts.
 - **Pre-test draft fact sheets** – it is recommended that the draft fact sheets be tested on some of the target intermediary groups who will be using them. The main thing to test is their understanding of the fact sheet. If you have multiple layouts they should also be tested. It is also a good idea to test the title for the fact sheet to make sure it is interesting and communicates the theme you want. Also, make sure to find out if there is any additional information they need.

- **Secure approvals** – before the fact sheets are put into final form for printing they must be checked for technical accuracy and, in some cases, policy appropriateness. This might involve outside technical specialists to check the draft fact sheets. The job order leader should do the final approval once he/she is sure that they are technically accurate, policy issues are not a problem and that they are understood by the target intermediary user groups.
 - **Prepare camera-ready copy and print** – once the approvals are received, the fact sheet will be finalized and printed. The RAMP technical team needs to be consulted to determine how many copies of the fact sheets need to be produced, and in what languages. The RAMP Communication Support Unit can assist with this step in recommending firms that can do this job.
 - **Dissemination by job order contractor** – the contractor needs to have a dissemination plan for each of the best practices fact sheets. They can be disseminated to the intermediary groups directly or through briefing meetings or training.
 - **RAMP archive and disseminate to other groups** – electronic and hard copies of all the best practices fact sheets need to be given to the RAMP team who will put them into the project library/information clearinghouse, post them on the RAMP Internet site and disseminate copies to other groups to use.
- 4. Guidelines on Selecting Subjects** – One of the hardest tasks is selecting the subjects for best practices fact sheets. It is recommended that fact sheets be prepared on all the major subjects/recommendations/issues the job order wants to communicate through intermediary groups to farmers. As mentioned above, it is recommended that a "subject tree" be prepared identifying subjects where fact sheets will be prepared. For example, the top of the subject tree could reflect the overall goals of the job order. This could be followed by one fact sheet summarizing each of the subcomponents. Under each subcomponent there could be a series of subjects at the next layer explaining the process and specific recommendations. There are several criteria for selecting subjects that need to be taken into consideration:
- **Relevance to farmers** – the subjects selected should reflect the information needs of the target farmers. There may have to be more than one fact sheet prepared on the same subjects if the recommendations vary by agro-climatic zones or for other reasons. It is important to understand what questions farmers will have on the best practices.
 - **Information needs of intermediary groups** – it is important to have a good idea of who will be the involved intermediary groups. You must assess the subjects and types of information needed to make sure they understand the technical and extension processes.
 - **Availability of relevant and accurate information** – it is essential that there is accurate and relevant information available on the best practices. The fact sheets serve as the repository for the information on the best practices.

- **Subject can be explained in two pages** – the subject for each fact sheet should be specific enough to be clearly explained in two pages printed on one sheet of paper. If it can't be done, then break the subject into sub topics which can be explained in the space available on a fact sheet. Normally fact sheets longer than two pages contain too many details or are too broad to address specific concerns of farmers.
5. **Organizing the Information** – Before beginning to write the fact sheet, the production team should create the following outline:
- **Overall key point** – this is the overall point which you want to get across to the reader of this fact sheet. This point should be put into the “highlighted summary box” as explained in the next section.
 - **Supporting points** – identify no more than four or five bullets giving the key supporting information to the main point. These bullets could be put in the “The Facts in Summary” described below.
 - **Questions farmers have** – identify what questions farmers will be asking the intermediary groups. It is important to include this information in the fact sheets so the intermediary groups can answer the farmers' questions.
 - **Identify appropriate visuals** – from the beginning, the team needs to begin identifying possible graphics, photographs, charts or other visuals that should be used in the fact sheet to support explaining the subject and add interest. Readers tend to look first at the visuals and then if they are interested they will read the writing. Therefore, the visuals are very important and must attract the attention of the reader and contribute to their understanding of the subject.
6. **Suggested Outline for Best Practices Fact Sheets** – The following is a suggested outline for best practices fact sheets. This outline might vary to fit the specific job order needs, audiences, subjects, and how the information is used. In most cases, the fact sheet should be on one sheet of paper printed on both sides.
- **Series title** – should be interesting and fit the overall theme of the job order.
 - **Fact sheet title** – should be descriptive of the best practice being recommended, interesting and where possible show the benefit.
 - **Summary of key point highlighted** – a summary of the message stressing the positive benefit or why important should be in a box with larger font somewhere prominent in the layout on the front page so that it attracts the attention of the reader and sets the stage for reading the fact sheet.
 - **Main body with key and supporting points** – The body of the main message—maybe 2/3s of a page in length—should include briefly information about:
 - a. what it is
 - b. why important/benefit
 - c. summary how done (if relevant)
 - d. who involved (if relevant)
 - e. when (if relevant)
 - **Questions farmers may ask** – a series of questions with brief answers should be included. These should be questions which farmers would have and need to be addressed by the intermediary groups. It gives the fact sheet credibility and allows including relevant information in a brief form. It is essential to prepare the intermediary groups to be able to respond to farmers' questions.

- **How to effectively communicate this information to farmers** – in some cases it is important to give the intermediary groups suggestions in the fact sheet on how they can communicate the best practices to farmers. This could include how to organize farm demonstration plots, field days, and other extension methods.
- **The facts in summary** – if appropriate and space is available, the last section should contain bullets stating the primary facts you want the reader to remember.
- **Where to get more information** – at the bottom on the back page should be a section which names the technical specialist who provided the information and how to contact him/her for additional information.
- **Date** – at the bottom of the back page should be the date prepared; normally month and year.
- **Code** – a code should be given at the top of the first page. This will have to be coordinated with the RAMP team.
- **Graphics** – each fact sheet should have at least one drawing, photograph, chart or some other visual which helps explain the subject and to make the fact sheet more interesting.
- **Layout and paper** –the layout for all the fact sheets should be uniform. The layout should be interesting and professional looking. The layout should not be too fancy or complex which can detract from the fact sheet message. The paper stock should be heavier than copy paper and of higher quality. A RAMP consultant will develop a template for fact sheets, including the type of paper to use, for the job order contractors to use.